

Article 75.

Tobacco Trust Fund

§ 143-715. Policy; purpose.

The General Assembly finds:

- (1) For many years, the State and its prosperity have been supported by its agricultural economy and particularly by the tobacco-related segment of the agricultural economy. The Master Settlement Agreement is expected to cause significant economic hardship upon the tobacco-related segment of the agricultural economy in that it is expected to result in reduced demand, sales, and prices for tobacco as an agricultural product.
- (2) Tobacco producers, tobacco allotment holders, and persons engaged in tobacco-related businesses are entitled to indemnification for the adverse economic effects in the State resulting from the Master Settlement Agreement, tobacco producers, allotment holders, and persons engaged in tobacco-related businesses are entitled to compensation for the economic losses resulting from lost quota in this State, and tobacco producers are entitled to compensation for the decline in value of tobacco-related personal property assets and declining market conditions in this State resulting from the Master Settlement Agreement, to the extent that funds are available in the Tobacco Trust Fund to address those purposes.
- (3) Even in the absence of the Master Settlement Agreement, the tobacco-related segment of the State's economy is experiencing severe economic hardship as it confronts a national decline in the use of, and demand for, tobacco products, which decline is expected to continue. At present, the tobacco producers, tobacco allotment holders, and persons engaged in tobacco-related businesses are facing an economic crisis that threatens their health and survival. Therefore, in addition to indemnification and compensation for losses in this State resulting from the Master Settlement Agreement, the public interest will be served by the funding of qualified agricultural programs that support, foster, encourage, and facilitate a strong agricultural economy in North Carolina. To the extent that funds are available in the Tobacco Trust Fund, expenditure of those funds to finance qualified agricultural programs is in the public interest.
- (4) It is a public purpose for these funds to be expended in this manner, and it is public service for these persons to accept these funds to the end that conditions of unemployment and fiscal distress may be alleviated or avoided, more stable local economies may be created, local tax bases may be stabilized and maintained, natural resources may be optimally used, and the general public may be benefited. (2000-147, s. 3.)